

Fine Lines & Feline Whiskers

Have you ever tried to paint out very fine lines – cat whiskers, for example, only to have them turn out anything but “fine?” I have some useful hints for you:

Masking – Before you paint:



1 If you want to mask the lines – that is, if you want your lines need to be the pristine white of the paper – you can try a Masque Pen, which is a little fine-tipped squirt bottle filled with aqua-blue masking fluid. The company makes a fine tip attachment which is great for thin lines. You can draw with this little point, which many find easier than using a brush. Since the mask will resist the paint, you can then proceed with the rest of the painting and simply rub the mask off of your lines once the paint is dry. Use even pressure to prevent “blurbs.”

2 If you prefer a brush, try using a very pointed #2 round to paint the lines. I like Winsor & Newton Masking Fluid best, but when painting fine lines, I like to mix a little extra non-staining watercolor pigment into a 1/2 teaspoon or so of mask to make it brighter. Your lines will then show up clearly on the white paper and you’ll easily see any goofs. A #2 brush will carry more masking fluid than a detail brush, allowing you to paint a fairly long line before dipping the brush again. With a tiny brush, you have to keep reloading, which causes blurbs in the line.



ADVANTAGE:

- Since both of these methods are done before painting, any line that is incorrect can easily be dried, rubbed off and redone without harm to the paper or the finished painting
- If you put a line in the wrong place and don’t notice until the painting is done, you can paint over it, then use one of the methods below to redo it.

DISADVANTAGE:

- Placement of lines has to be determined before watercolor is applied.

After you paint – SCRATCHING OUT OR USING OPAQUE PAINT.



3 One of my favorite tricks for cat whiskers is to scratch the lines out with a sharp, fine-pointed exacto knife. This process is done at the very end, when the painting is nearly finished. Scratch the line in with one stroke, using the blade to lightly scratch the paint surface, not to cut into the paper. Then come back a second time over the same line, scratching a little deeper to remove the color and expose the white paper. Practice on an old painting before you do this on your masterpiece – just to make sure you know how much pressure to use.

ADVANTAGE:

- You get nice, crisp lines without trying to “draw”, which many people find easier.

DISADVANTAGE:

- You can damage the paper if you scratch too deeply and it can be hard to cover up scratched in lines if you change your mind.

4 One more method is to paint the lines in over the finished painting with white Designer’s Gouache. This technique has the same perils as using making fluid or the masque pen, so use a pointed #2 round and thin the gouache to a good, paintable consistency. Simply paint the lines on, using a steady hand. It helps to rest the wrist comfortably so you can rotate the wrist to paint the line in one smooth stroke.

ADVANTAGES:

- This method can be used at the very end of the painting to add extra lines. -It doesn’t damage the paper.

DISADVANTAGES:

- Gouache can be hard to paint over with watercolor in case of a mistake. If you do goof, scratch the mistake off gently with your fingernail, paint over the area with watercolor and then redo the line.
- Lines painted with gouache won’t be as bright white as masked or scratched lines.



I generally use all of these methods combined for cat whiskers! I like to mask out the most obvious, bright ones. Then, when the painting is done, I scratch in a few more with my exacto knife. Usually I end up adding a few strokes of gouache at the very end. The gouache lines will not be as bright white as the masked and scratched lines so will appear to be behind them. This adds depth and interest.